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On 100th Anniversary as Town's Free Public Library

Brooks Memorial Library Squeezed By Tightening of the Budget Belt

By KEVIN O'CONNOR

When Meris Morrison, director of Brooks Memorial Library, says "the only way is up," she is not speaking of a new space-oriented reading program.

Morrison, like many other town department heads, is instead referring to the present budget situation. Required to present a level-funded budget for the past three years and to cut \$8,000 in 1980, the library this year has been unable to operate within its budget.

In an interview, Morrison said the eroding library budget has resulted in serious deficiencies, including fewer operating hours, cutbacks in services, and a smaller number of books and materials purchased. She spoke as the library prepares to observe its 100th year as Brattleboro's free public library.

Recent Budget Problems

The library's budget problems began in 1980 when selectmen cut the fiscal year 1981 budget by \$8,000. The action was taken by selectmen to implement a \$70,000 budget cut ordered by Town Meeting.

The 1982 fiscal year budget, which ended June 30, was overspent by an estimated \$2,000, caused by increases in the electrical and fuel costs. The selectmen in May agreed to help cover the deficit.

Cost increases are also affecting the 14-day-old 1983 fiscal year budget, according to Morrison, who said the library is already underbudget for this year. Since the budget was proposed, electric bills have increased by 12.5 percent and fuel prices and postal rates are anticipated to rise.

At the March 1982 Town Meeting, an attempt to add \$25,000 to 1983 library budget lost by only 15 votes. The money was proposed for materials, and not for the anticipated utility costs increases.

The library budget has been cut with a two-edge sword. First, book, magazine, and newspaper prices have doubled and book processing costs have risen 30 percent, reducing the budget's buying power. Second, water, fuel and electricity costs have risen, forcing a 16 percent cut in library materials to make the budget balance.

Cost-Cutting Measures

The library has instigated as many cost-cutting measures as possible, Morrison said. In 1980, operating hours were reduced by cutting back part-time personnel and closing on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons. A "checkpoint" book dejection system, purchased with bequest funds, was installed to cut down on unauthorized removal of material and to minimize financial loss.

Many books and materials are now purchased cooperatively with other institutions. Less expensive but less durable paperback books are more frequently purchased, and rented films have been replaced by free movies for evening programs.

Most recently killed by the budget ax has been "Babbling Brooks," the bimonthly newsletter announcing special events, movies, and exhibitors at the library.

Morrison asked that concerned people speak out and get involved in the library. She said that many have volunteered work time, donated books and pledged gifts of money. She added that community support is more important than ever because federal grants, which have purchased video equipment, a microfilm reader-printer and special collections, are being cut.

Praise for Town Officials

Many at this year's Town Meeting were critical of the handling of the budget by the town administration,

pointing to the 5 to 6 percent increase in most department budgets as opposed to 3 percent for the library.

But Morrison had nothing but praise for local government officials. She described Brattleboro town personnel as "dedicated, cooperative and understanding people" who work in a team effort to better the community, and added that all town departments are in a bind because of tight funds.

However, the library budget is depleted, Morrison said, but the selectmen have informed her that they will agree to increase her 1984 budget rather than level fund it as in the past.

Morrison said that an increase in funding is crucial if the library building is to be maintained properly.

Replacement of carpeting on the first floor, reupholstery of chairs and attention to the boiler, air conditioning system and furnace are projects Morrison has recommended, for none have received major attention since their installation 13 years ago.

But the repairs will require more than just a little elbow grease. Carpeting only the first floor will cost

\$7,000, and the furnace work will cost \$3,000.

Morrison mentioned library tables which last year were sanded and varnished by the Youth Services Commission and expressed hope that other organizations would do similar work.

Space in the library building presents no problem to Morrison, for the library collection is constantly combed to insure that only necessary material is included.

And What If...

On a lighter note, Morrison was asked what the library would do with a \$1 million windfall.

Thinking conservatively, Morrison said she would reinstate Friday night and Saturday afternoon service, install a computerized book check-out system, and purchase a computer for public use.

But how would the frivolous side of the librarian spend the money?

Morrison said she would build another story built on top of the present library structure to serve as a larger meeting space and a performing arts center.

With this, said Morrison, "the only way is up!"

Living



Norman Rasmus

TAKE ME TO YOUR READER — An unidentified space creature dropped into Brattleboro on July 4 to "Get the Message at Brooks Library," the theme of the library's parade entry and summer reading campaign.

Flipping Through the Early Pages of Brooks Memorial Library's History Book

By KEVIN O'CONNOR

"It is to be hoped that its history as well as its advantages may be fully known and appreciated and that the memory of the giver may be honored by successive generations."

This was the wish of the Reformer of July 16, 1909, to Brattleboro's Free Public Library and to the late George J. Brooks, donor of the building then housing the institution.

The history of Brooks Memorial Library, which this year celebrates its 100th anniversary as the town's free public library, goes back to 1842 and the organization of a Brattleboro Library Association.

Inception of Library

As early as 1822 a circulating library could be found in the town, privately housed in a bookstore.

Brattleboro's public library, however, had its birth on Oct. 3, 1842, at a meeting at Wheeler's Hall in Brattleboro.

This public assembly place was over John Wheeler's clothing store on Main Street, and, according to Miss Mary Cabot in the Annals of Brattleboro, was the only store in town where liquor was never in evidence.

The Brattleboro Library Association was formed by a few hundred of Brattleboro's best citizens and maintained with a special fund of \$2,500 and by the payment of membership fees and a small annual assessment levied on each member.

In 1858 this association had 2,000 volumes. A reading room was opened on July 30, 1859.

The library association "dragged its slow length along for 40 years, as libraries do," according to Reformer of 1909, until a movement to merge this "partnership library" into a town affair was begun.

In 1882 the library association members proposed to turn over to the town the books and other properties in their possession, provided the town would establish and maintain a public library which should be free to all.

This proposition, the main issue of the 1882 Town Meeting, was formally accepted on March 7.

The Vermont Phoenix of March 10, 1882, reported that "the several articles in regard to the establishment and maintenance of a free public library were carried, not only without opposition, but by full and strong votes in the affirmative."

Resolutions passed that day provided that the town establish and maintain a public library, that the lower Town Hall be given for the use and accommodation of the library, that \$1,000 be appropriated for the purchase of books and the maintenance of the library, that a committee would draft rules and by-laws and report same for the action of the town at an adjourned Town Meeting on April 8, 1882, and that the town accept the proposed union and transfer of the library and other properties of the Brattleboro Library Association with the free public library to be established by the town.

Opening of Library

At an adjourned meeting held April 8, 1882, by-laws were adopted and a board of trustees elected. The 2,700 volumes were moved to a place in the lower Town Hall set apart for library use. The town hall was located on Main Street on the site on which today is the Main Street Gallery.

On May 15, 1882, Mrs. Annie E. Fulton was hired to catalogue the books and to be librarian when the institution was opened to the public.

She remained until April 12, 1883, when Miss Kate Austin was appointed librarian, as Mrs. Fulton "refused to accept the proposition of the board" in regard to salary, according to Miss Cabot, apparently a reference to a budget dispute.

The library finally opened on its new basis on Sept. 18, 1882, operating on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday (excepting holidays) from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., 2 to 5 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m.

Within four days after opening, 200 persons had obtained library cards.

Those who could take out books were male inhabitants over 21 and females over 18 "upon recommendation of trustees, certain town or school officials or any minister of the gospel regularly officiating in the town" and by signing an obligation to obey rules.

Brooks Donates Building

Liberal appropriations to the library were made annually by the town. From that time to the present, the town has made appropriations for the support of the library.

In 1886 George J. Brooks erected the building which was home of the library until 1967. It was located on the former site of the Joseph Goodhue house on Main Street which today is the site of the Post Office parking lot.

Having witnessed the completion of his gift, within a few days of the time set for its dedication, Brooks died suddenly on Dec. 23, 1886, at the Brooks House, the hotel which he erected in 1872.

The Reformer of 1909 said, "Brattleboro has reason, certainly, for gratitude because of her commodious hotel and splendid library, as monuments of Mr. Brooks's liberality."

The library moved to its present quarters in 1967. To commemorate the occasion, a detailed history of the library was written by Mrs. Barbara Worden. The piece is the most complete historical account of the institution and is available in the local history room of the library.

Local History Important

When the library came into possession of the town in 1882, Charles N. Davenport, founder of the Reformer, made provision that the sum of \$1,000 be set apart from his estate, the yearly interest of which to be expended in the purchase of books of an historical and political nature, preference being given to local history.

And today, the accumulation of local history material is still a library priority. The local history room on the mezzanine level was recently enlarged by an allocation of funds from the Brooks Building Board, which has control of \$15,000 given by the heirs of George J. Brooks for the maintenance of the library.

In 1982, the library has the largest circulation of any town free public library in the state, distributing 200,000 books a year. Approximately 14,000 adult cards and 2,600 children cards are outstanding. The West Brattleboro Branch Library, a one-person operation, is responsible for one-quarter of the circulation.

The library will celebrate its 100th anniversary as Brattleboro's free public library on Saturday, Sept. 18, according to library director Meris Morrison. Birthday cake and refreshments will be served, and all citizens attending will be asked to bring a birthday card for the library. More information pertaining to the event will be announced in August.

PEGGY WATSON

Work In Progress

It is probable that most of us that are interested in cooking have on the kitchen shelf stuffed between the cookbooks a folder or envelope bulging with recipes and food ideas which we have clipped from newspapers and magazines.

My folder is pretty thick, much of the contents brown with age. Since I have tossed things into it chronologically there is some hope of finding my more recent discoveries, but the rest of this mass of treasured information is an impenetrable jungle of confusion.

Searching for a dimly remembered recipe leads only to frustration. I may chance on some jewels, but they are only distractions when a plump chicken is what is sitting on the kitchen table.

I've been intending to correct this situation for some time. I've been thinking about it. Then on July 7 there was an excellent article in the New York Times on this subject by Patrick Flanagan. His solution is based on one or more looseleaf notebooks. He suggests 6 1/2 by 9 inches as the best size as it is similar to that of other cookbooks, and a different color for each recipe.

The way to start out is to go through your folder making a list of

them to the pages with tape and organizing them into your notebooks, but the prospect of arriving at such an orderly state of affairs is tempting.

One clipping I came across in another file is captioned "WEAVER THINKING OF RUNNING." Since I am a weaver and also toy with the idea of taking up running as a good form of exercise, I was most curious to find out what this other weaver's ideas were on the subject. To my chagrin the other weaver turned out to be a Mr. Weaver who was thinking of seeking political office. Poor Mr. Weaver must, clearly, at some definite time, stop thinking and come to a decision while I can go on thinking about running indefinitely — for months or even years.

However in the case of my recipe folder Mr. Flanagan has presented such a persuasive plan that I think I will actually do it. I've already gone through my folder and come up with 23 tentative categories including one on equipment and one on nutrition.

But there are problems. For example the following recipe for a cold salad of fish and potatoes might be assigned to "fish" or "salad" or "cold dishes" or "cold fish." I think I'll put it under the last as I think that